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ABSTRACT

High school reform efforts in the 1980s have negatively affected the access to vocational education of high school students, including those with special needs, as evidenced by a longitudinal study of the course-taking patterns of high school students in one Illinois community (called "Fremont" in the study). The sample was composed of 575 white, black, and mainstreamed special needs high school students. The course-taking patterns of the classes of 1981, 1984, and 1987 were examined, as well as the patterns of four years of courses taken by one class. Major findings included the following: (1) the number of courses required for graduation at Fremont exceeded that required by Illinois both before and after the state requirements were increased due to the reform movement; (2) a slight but steady decrease in vocational courses occurred as an increase in mathematics course-taking occurred; (3) black students' achievement improved, perhaps as a result of decreased remedial course-taking and increased academic coursework; and (4) special education student achievement declined, based on a significant increase in mainstreamed course-taking. (CML)

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LEGISLATIVE ISSUES SHAPING FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Up the Down Staircase: Carl Perkins' Transition Initiatives and School Reform

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Up the Down Staircase: Carl Perkins' Transition Initiatives and School Reform

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Central to the 1980s reform movement in American education is the well publicized crisis with our public schools and more specifically, with secondary schools. Between 1980 and 1984, over 275 reports critical of American education have been issued. In response to these reports, state legislatures in 43 or 86% of the states mandated graduation requirements with more mathematics, more science, and more English. In short, legislatures expanded their role in public education from mandating equal amounts of time spent in school to determining minimal amounts of curricular activity for all high school graduates.

Paralleling these reform efforts has been an evolving social movement that has called for increased normalization for all persons with disabilities. At the federal level, public laws have emerged in the 1980s that have incorporated this notion of normalization vis-a-vis transition from-school-to-work initiatives. PL 98-524, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984, is one of these.

Presented herein, is a comparison of the 1980s education reform mandates and the transition initiatives found in the Carl Perkins Act. Special attention is focused on the role of vocational education in terms of at-risk populations and their transition from-school-to-work. Issues are presented that relate to the challenges brought about by school reform efforts in implementation of the current and future Perkins legislation.

Up the Down Staircase: Carl Perkins' Transition Initiatives and School Reform

Even as we gather here today, Congressional leaders, vocational education leadership, consumers, and especially advocacy groups representing special needs populations are becoming increasingly involved in the deliberations pertaining to the renewal by Congress in 1989 of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984. Recently, several advocacy groups consisting of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (PCEPD), the American Vocational Association (AVA), the Special Needs Division of AVA (SND), and the National Association of Vocational Education Special Needs Personnel (NAVESNP) conducted a hearing on the re-authorization. This hearing resulted in the formulation of seven recommendations:

1. That 10% of the grant funds be used for the excess costs associated with educating all students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment;

2. That the 50:50 set-aside cash match be extended to provide the excess cost required to serve students with disabilities in an effective and comprehensive manner;

3. That the role of certified rehabilitation counselors be strengthened;

4. That states be permitted to use up to 10% of set-aside funds for targeted program improvement projects and activities;

5. That the emphasis be on programs for those who are disabled;

6. That interagency coordination and cooperation be continued and strengthened at all levels and between all appropriate agencies; and,

7. That the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of vocational education programs must be appropriately broadened ... to include the knowledge and skills needed for transition to the work place, further education, and/or adult services. (NARF, 1989, p. 4.)

As noted by Harold Russell, Chairman of the PCEPD, this hearing provided an excellent opportunity for professional groups and individuals directly involved in vocational education programs to offer insights as to the quality, effectiveness, and impact of the Perkins Act.

Today, it is my intent to offer those present further insight into those aspects of the Perkins Act that involve the notion of "transition" ... and how

such "transition" initiatives contained in the Act are in direct conflict to the 1980s school reform efforts. On a broader scale, data is presented which describe how school reform efforts, particularly in Illinois, have and continue to negatively affect the access of vocational education not only to special needs populations but to all high school students. To illuminate these inconsistencies between the Perkins Act and school reform efforts, four inter-related facets are presented: (a) an overview of the transition from-school-to-work movement, (b) an identification of the transition initiatives contained within PL 98-524, (c) an overview of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) reform mandates; and (d) a longitudinal view of the course-taking patterns of high school graduates (Decoteau, 1988).

Transition From-School-to-Work

There is well underway in the United States a social movement that is characterized by its proponents as seeking community integration for all individuals with disabilities (Wolfensberger, 1971; Flynn & Nitsch, 1980; Wehman, 1988). Since taking shape in the 1970s, the movement has and continues to challenge the traditional ways in which service providers in the fields of rehabilitation, special education, and vocational education assist those individuals with the severest of disabilities in leading as normal lives as possible (Wehman, 1981; Rusch, 1986; Vogelsburg, Ashe, & Williams, 1986). Not one but several influences seem to have provided the parameters for this movement and include: (a) policy makers incorporating "transition" initiatives within legislation thus reflecting the movement's goal of community integration (Will, 1984a, 1984b), (b) advances in behavioral technology enabling individuals with severe disabilities to engage in competitive work activities which, less than a decade ago, were thought beyond their potential (Barrett & Lavin, 1987; Wehman & Kregel, 1988; Kerachsky & Thornton, 1987; Smith & Coleman, 1986), and (c) consumers and their parents vis-a-vis the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) have emerged as key factors in the educational process (PL 94-142).

Unifying these influences are changes in philosophical outcomes for individuals with disabilities. A comparison between the role individuals with disabilities held in society during the turn of the century and modern day society serves to illustrate this significant shift in philosophy. At the turn of the century, the societal place for individuals with disabilities was one of segregation and non-participation. Gradually evolving over the past thirty years has been a recognition of their civil and human rights as individuals to be part of the mainstream in society and to lead as normal a life as possible. In order to achieve this, individuals with disabilities would have to participate as equals in our schools, communities, and the work place.

Following these changes in philosophy came shifts in legislation that affected the provision of civil, human, and societal rights for individuals with disabilities (Kiernan & Stark, 1986). In the area of Education, PL 94-142, a landmark piece of legislation, was enacted in the mid-1970s which proclaimed not only the individual with disabilities right to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, but made public

education part of an individuals education program agreed upon between the parent (or guardian), the individual student, and the local school district officials responsible for the provision of special education. In addition, PL 94-142 went further in providing a means of due process so that differences in opinion for the delivery of special education services could be challenged by either on behalf of the student or the school district.

At a time when two-thirds of the persons with disabilities who were unemployed but wanted to work after exiting public schools, federal officials introduced in the early 1980s amendments to PL 94-142 which involved "transition from-school-to-work" initiatives. Similar to the impact of PL 94-142 itself, these amendments and their transition initiatives have had profound impact in legitimizing education's role in providing those missing linkages between school and employment to which individuals with disabilities needed in order to achieve integration into the societal mainstream. These initiatives and their impact upon federal and state special education legislation were not done without the overt leadership of OSERS administrators, especially Undersecretary Madeleine Will, who viewed transition from-school-to-work as a logical sequence of activities to follow the least restrictive environments of PL 94-142.

Suggested by Will in 1984 is the Transition From-School-To-Work Model which provided a conceptual view of the continuum of services that individuals with disabilities needed in order to become competitively employed (see Figure 1). According to Will's Model (1984a), transition services are grouped into three distinct classes, based upon the services utilized:

1. Transition from school either without services or with only those services and/or opportunities that are available to the population at large.

2. Temporary or time-limited services that are designed to lead to independent employment at the termination of services.

3. On-going service (such a lifelong, custodial care services) for those disabled individuals who do not move to unsupported work roles.

In essence, each of these types of services provides the "bridges" from-school-to-work. The first bridge refers to the ability of those individuals to seek and gain employment with services or those "generic services" available to all, including the able bodied, e.g., parent and friends assisting in the acquisition of employment, postsecondary education opportunities paving the way for saleable job skills. Encompassing the role of the Federal/State VR Program, "time-limited services" is the term will refers to those services which service providers implemented within given beginning and ending points in time in order to achieve competitive employment. New to scope of services was the notion of "on-going services" which Will indicates, as opposed to time-limited services, occur throughout one's lifespan in order to maintain a supported work role.

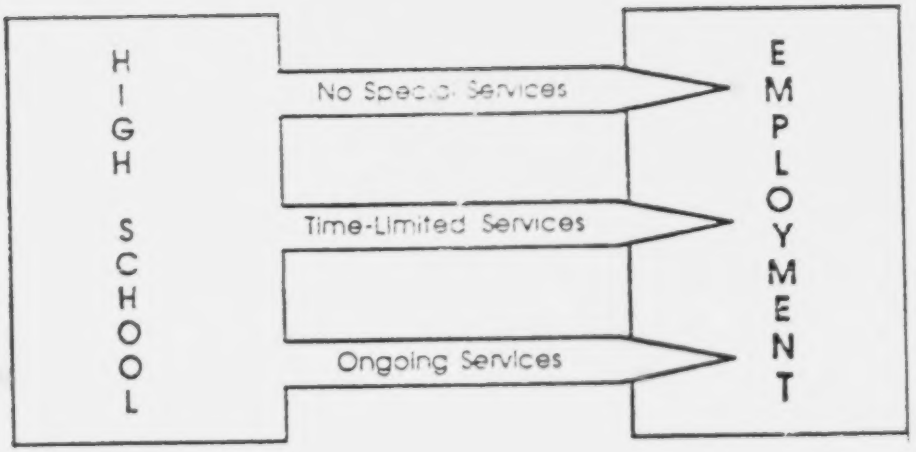


Figure 1. Will's (1984a) OSERS Model for describing the bridges from-school-to-work.

Will's model is not the only transition from-school-to-work model which arose out of the early 1980s. Halpern (1985) expanded Will's model by viewing employment as only one component of what Halpern referred to as "community adjustment" (see Figure 2). Employment was for Halpern, only one component of "community adjustment" to which he added the domains of residential environment and social and interpersonal networks. Maintained were Will's original three categories of services. In short, researchers such as Halpern recognized that factors other than an individual's performance on the work site, affects an individual's successful integration into society.

Carl Perkins' Transition Initiatives

The intent of introducing the Carl Perkins' "transition initiatives" into this discussion is to do so within the context to which the 1984 Vocational Education Act revised previous VEA legislation by specifying activities that state recipients of the funds administered under the Act must provide special needs populations. To suggest that the Perkins Act contains a number of initiatives designated as transition from-school-to-work activities would be false. That is, while the legislation does mention that "(4) counseling services designed to facility the transition from school to post-school employment and career opportunities" must be provided each [special needs] student who enrolls in vocational education programs, the Act does not contain other initiatives within the Act specifically mentioning "transition". On the other hand, if "transition" is to refer to a vehicle through which special needs populations may pass in order to acquire post-school employment and career opportunities, than the Perkins Act is indeed much richer than the previous Vocational Education Legislation in providing several strategies (initiatives) for increasing their access to vocational education ... and thus providing a "bridge" from school to adult life and the world of work.

Developmentally, Vocational Education Legislation has evolved through several metamorphoses. Beginning with the VEA of 1963, the Act recognized that handicapped and disadvantaged populations should benefit through vocational education thus resulting in their specific mention in VEA legislation since 1963. What we learned from those the state which implemented tne Act, was that without a setaside for either population, each would not be served or when they were, they would be in separate programs of which were geared more to the traditional secondary pre-vocational programming, e.g., typing, cooking, woodworking than those vocational education programs considered occupationally specific.

With the mention of special needs populations, VEA legislation has evolved to include the notion of setasides. Simply put, of whatever the total amount of Federal/state monies received by LEAs, specific percentages must be setaside by each eligible recipient for the fundamental purpose related to the support of handicapped and disadvantaged populations enrolled in vocational education programs. Since the establishment of these setasides in VEA Legislation has increased its use of setasides as well as expanded not only on the way setaside funds may be used but to include, as in the Perkins Act, what minimal services must be provided special needs populations.

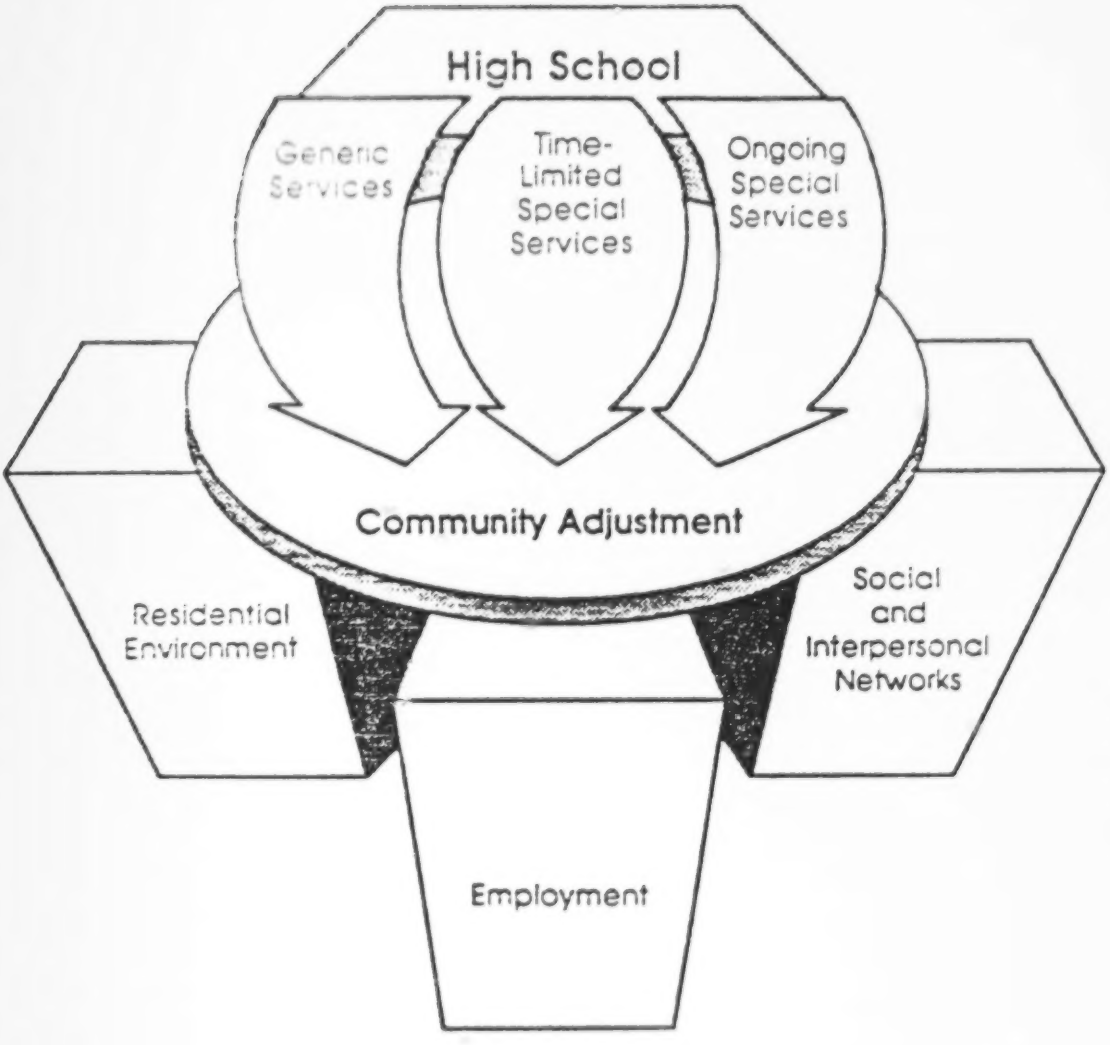


Figure 2. Halpern's (1985) expanded version of Will's (1984) OSERS Transition Model.

In a broad sense, the Perkins' "transition initiatives" refer to these minimal services, which include:

- assessment of the interests, abilities, and special needs of such students with respect to completing successfully the vocational education program;

- special services, including adaption of curriculum, instruction, equipment, and facilities, designed to meet the needs described above;

- guidance, counseling, and career development activities conducted by professionally trained counselors who are associated with the provision of such special services; and,

- counseling services designed to facilitate the transition from school to post-school employment and career opportunities.

In addition, two additional requirements are contained within the Perkins Act which pertain to recipients of funds distributed to eligible recipients under the Act:

- Each LEA which receives funds for special needs populations will provide information to each student and his/her parents concerning the opportunities available in vocational and the eligibility for enrollment;

- Each LEA which receives funds for special needs populations may use those setaside funds only for supplemental or additional staff, materials, and services which are essential for the special needs individual to participate and succeed in vocational education;

Treating each of the above as a means leading to successful completion of a vocational program of which will, in theory, result in a "bridge" from school to work, lays basis for identifying these "mandates" as the Perkins' "transition initiatives".

In short, when viewing the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 in terms of the "transition initiatives" contained within, it is more the intent of the Act, its setasides and how they are to be managed that are at issue in this discussion. Quite clearly, these coalesce to the basic thrust behind the setasides in providing access and equity to vocational education and to the post-school employment and career opportunities they unlock for special needs populations. A successful transition to work and adult life is is assumed as the primary outcome for those handicapped and disadvantaged populations when they are provided access to vocational education opportunities.

Overview of the 1980's Reform in American Public Education

The debate over the goals of public education is not a new one. Even back in the days of the ancient Greek philosophers, Aristotle wrote in his work titled, Politics, of the then unresolved debate over the goals of education as he posed, " ... should the useful in life, or should virtue, or should the higher knowledge, be the aim of our training" (cited in McKeon, 1941, p. 1306)? Here in the United States, similar concern has been raised in concert with the evolution of American public education as the institution goes from one perceived crisis to another (Kent, 1987; Podeschi & Hachbarth, 1986). The current debate of the 1980s is no exception. Many critics of American education wrote in the early 1980s of the deteriorating conditions they found in our schools (Boyer, 1983; Goodlad, 1984; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Between 1980 and the beginning of 1984, the Education Commission of the States (1984) counted over 275 different reports from commissions, blue ribbon panels, professional associations, and studies on the condition of public education in the United States. The overall effect of such larger numbers of reports was to clearly place the need for educational reform on the agendas of parents, school administrators, legislators, the business community, higher education leadership, and the public in general. Often cited in these reports were comparisons based on such standardized scores as the SAT which have shown a gradual decline in both verbal and mathematics subsections over the past decade. These "indicators" of how well our public schools were performing have painted a dismal picture of public education during the early part of the 1980s. Even Goodlad (1984) predicted eventual doom of our public schools unless a renewal of our schools occurred.

Providing politicians with an issue, especially around election time, made calls for reform in education part of the campaign debate with both political parties demanding that something be done. This political fervor is best illustrated in the manner which the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) delivered its report, "A Nation At Risk". Not only was the report delivered to the Congress, but the Secretary of Education, Terrel Bell carried the report to regional forums held across the country. On stage with him were key legislators who told those educational leaders present that public education was in need of repair and that there were things they could do together to assist in the rebuilding of public education.

Before long, 43 states had implemented increased state requirements for secondary graduation (Chance, 1986). Illinois was one of the first of the 43 to respond to the "crisis" as state level education policy makers already had been in the process of studying education in its schools since 1980. In July of 1981, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) began Phase I of an ongoing study of all its state mandates for grades K through 12. In that process, their review included such programs as those for special education and bilingual education. ISBE even sought to define schooling in terms of a curriculum consisting of (a) Language Arts, (b) Mathematics, (c) Science, (d) History and Government, (e) Fine Arts, and (f) Physical Education.

In 1982, Illinois State Board of Education authorized research in the areas of early childhood education and secondary schools to determine what characteristics were present in 11 schools which had been recognized for their excellence in education. Additionally, the ISBE sponsored studies which investigated the effects of various categories of students, from those who took Foreign Language classes to truants. The Illinois State Board of Education in their next phase of their on going study of public education, recommended to the legislature that (a) compulsory attendance be changed from 16 to 18, (b) the school day be extended two hours, and (c) that the school day include a minimum of five hours per day of academics in each student's course of studies. To support need for such increases in the curriculum, the Illinois State Board of Education suggested postsecondary institutions change their admission criteria to reflect four years each of Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies as well as include two years of Foreign Languages (U.S. Department of Education, 1984).

One area all leadership agreed upon in the 1980s reform debate was in the need to re-evaluate high school graduation requirements. As noted earlier, 43 states increased their graduation requirements by 1984. Illinois was one of the first to do so. Table 1 presents the "old" (ISBE, 1977) and "revised" (ISBE, 1986) curricular requirements for graduating from Illinois secondary schools. As noted in the table, 16 units were all that the state required for graduation of which a minimum of three units of Language Arts, one unit of Social Studies, one-half unit of Consumer Education, and one unit of Physical Education/Health had to be earned. In addition, each school district had to offer Driver Education. As pointed out by both Boyer (1983) and Goodlad (1984), Mathematics and Science courses were often omitted in the required course of studies for all high school students.

Paralleling the ISBE increases in the minimal high school graduation requirements, and in response to the ISBE calls for strengthening their increased academic requirements, the Illinois Board of Higher Education responded by establishing curricular guidelines for eligibility for all those wishing to attend Illinois postsecondary institutions. Effective in 1993 for Illinois postsecondary admissions, these minimal requirements and their comparison to the revised ISBE requirements are presented in Table 2. Of note is the fact that the IBHE requirements that were adopted are less than the four years each of Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Sciences originally suggested by the ISBE in the early 1980s. Further, should districts "adopt" the IBHE criteria for all students while maintaining the minimum number of units to graduate, secondary students will, at most, have to eliminate all electives and, at the very least, will have to surpass the minimal number of ISBE units to graduate.

State legislatures such as those in Illinois have succeeded in mandating higher standards for public education in order to address the declining test scores. Equally important a concern however, is a growing public concern regarding how these mandated reforms have affected the students themselves. The statistics regarding at risk populations are equally alarming as the need for revisions in the graduation requirements. In short, out of the 1980s period of school reform mandates has come a time when fewer minorities and lower social strata students have chosen not to go on to postsecondary

Table 1

"Old" and "Revised" Illinois State Board of Education Unit Requirments for Graduation

Discipline	Prior to Fall, 1986	After the Fall, 1986
Language Arts	3.00	3.00
Mathematics	none	2.00
Social Studies	1.00*	2.00**
Science	none	1.00
Foreign Language/Art/VE	none	1.00
Consumer Education	.50	.50
Driver Education	must offer	.15
Physical Education/Health	1.00	2.00***
Subtotal	5.00	11.65
Electives	11.00	4.35

* includes US History
** one of which is US History or US Government
*** based upon participating in PE/Health daily

Table 2

Comparison Between Revised ISBE Graduation Requirements and the IBHE Postsecondary Eligibility Admission Guidelines

Discipline	ISBE Requirements	IBHE Requirements
Language Arts	3.00 Units	4.00 Units
Mathematics	2.00	3.00
Social Sciences	2.00*	3.00
Science	1.00	3.00
Foreign Lanuage/Art/VE	1.00	2.00**
Additional State Required Units		
Consumer Education	.50	.50
Driver Education	.15	.15
Physical Education/Health	2.00***	2.00
Subtotal	11.65	17.65
Electives****	+4.35	-1.65

* one of which is US History or US Government
** excludes art and vocational education courses
*** represents daily participation in PE/Health
**** based upon minimum of 16 units for graduation

institutions after completing high school (Commission on Work, Family, and Citizenship, 1988). National dropout rates among the Black and Hispanic populations are alarming. The Institute for Educational Leadership (1987) reports that approximately 13% of white students drop out; between 12 and 24% of all black students do not complete high school; and estimated 40% of all Hispanic students leave school before graduation; in some districts, it is estimated that as many as 75% of Puerto Ricans drop out; and, 48% of Native Americans drop out. IEL further asserts that traditional curriculum with these "at-risk" populations does not work. With all of the mandated curriculum focusing on the "basics", one cannot help but ponder to what extent will the increased "basics" further frustrate this populations and facilitate a decade of "push outs" -- let alone improve excellence in our public schools.

Legislatures have tinkered with the institution of schooling by mandating not only the quantity of schooling by quality of schooling in terms of specifying increased graduation requirements and competencies. Despite reported declines in the number of graduates planning to attend a postsecondary institution, overall vocational enrollments have continued to decrease in most states (Frantz, Strickland, & Elson, 1987). In short, the 1980s reform movement with its increased academic graduation requirements has created a time when shifts from vocational education curricular to more traditional academic course-taking have occurred in the name of school improvement. Other than the superficial school report cards and some indications that SAT and ACT scores have somewhat "stabilized", little outcome data describing the course-taking shifts occurring at the secondary level. Continued support of legislated "academic" mandates, such as those contained within the IBHE eligibility requirements, will no doubt continue to be implemented into the 1990s.

A Longitudinal View of the Course-taking Patterns of High School Graduates

At the beginning of the 1980s, the analysis of transcripts has provided insight into the course-taking patterns of students enrolled in schools. Using the technique of transcript analysis, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) expressed its concern that students were not taking sufficient coursework in the basic academic courses, e.g., English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Natural Sciences, and Foreign Languages. Similar studies utilizing transcript analysis as part of their research also confirmed the Commission's findings (Boyer, 1983; Goodlad, 1984; Hull, Walker, & Murphy, 1986; Oakes, 1985; Grossman, Kirst, Negash, & Schmidt-Posner, 1985). The Commission called for a renewed excellence in public schools starting with an increase in graduation requirements, e.g., four years of English, three each of Mathematics, Social Studies, and Sciences, and one-half year of Computer Science. In addition, the Commission urged that two years of a Foreign Language for college bound students be required. Up until 1988, transcript analysis had not be reported as a tool for assessing the impact of these legislated mandates on the course-taking of high school students.

Inspired by Murphy and Hallinger's 1985-1986 use of transcript analysis to describe a longitudinal view of four years of a selected population of secondary students, Decoteau (1988) designed a longitudinal study describing

the course-taking patterns of graduates during a portion of time during which the 1980s reform mandates were being implemented in one particular Illinois community. The "Fremont, Illinois" study not only looked at the four years of course-taking by one graduating class, but in addition the study provided data through which to compare the course-taking patterns across three cohort classes of 1981, 1984, and 1987.

Sampled were roughly 1 in 5 graduates from each of the three cohort classes with a total N=575. More specifically, three samples of graduates were drawn from whose transcripts were coded and analyzed: (a) a representative sample across the cohort classes (n=450), (b) an oversample of the first sample of Black graduates (n=180), and (c) the entire population of mainstreamed special education high school graduates (n=67).

From his analysis of the transcript data and the community's efforts to comply with the ISBE increased graduation requirements, several aspects related to the reform mandates become clear.

Impact of the ISBE Mandates on One Community's Graduation Requirements

Presented previously, was a comparison of the "old" and "revised" state high school graduation requirements (see Table 1). While no change in the total number of units necessary for graduation was made (16 units), the revised requirements did identify 6.65 units which needed to be taken in the areas of Mathematics, Science, Foreign Language/Art/Vocational Education, as well as increase the number of Social Studies. Such increases and additions clearly support claims that state high school graduation requirements were woefully outdated (Boyer, 1983; Goodlad, 1984). Decoteau (1988) did not however arrive at the same conclusion when he compared the impact of the new ISBE mandates.

In his study, Decoteau selected a community he identified as "Fremont, Illinois" - populations approximately 100,000. Contained with the Fremont School District were three separate high schools located strategically within the city limits. During the period in which the study focuses, busing of Black students from their neighborhoods was used to achieve an equalized enrollment of Blacks across the three high schools. In addition to the three high schools, Fremont offered advanced vocational education programs to students at an Area Vocational Center (AVC) located in the central downtown area.

Past and present Fremont School District graduation requirements are presented in Table 3. As indicated, Fremont's "old" graduation requirements and those passed by the state differed little. Thus, while the state requirements have demonstrated a significant increase in graduation requirements, Fremont's has not. In addition, it is clear that Fremont's graduation requirements, both before and after the reform mandates, surpassed the state's minimum requirements. According to James Johnson, an ISBE representative responsible for Illinois Public School approval (personal communication, April 12, 1988), Fremont's, like over 80% of other school districts throughout Illinois, graduation requirements encompassed those mandated by the state.

Table 3

Unit Requirements for Graduation by the Fremont School District

Discipline	Before Reform (prior to Fall, 1986)	Reform (after Fall, 1986)
Language Arts	3.00	3.50
Mathematics	1.00	2.00
Social Sciences	3.00	2.00*
Science	1.00	1.00
Music, Art, Voc. Ed., or Foreign Language	1.00	1.00
Consumer Education	.50	.50
Driver Education	.15	.15
PE/Health	2.00	2.00
Health	-	.50
Total Units for Graduation	16.00	17.00
Requirements	11.65	12.65
Electives	4.35	4.35

* one is US History and one is World History

Through his analysis of the various representative sample transcripts, Decoteau found that: (a) Fremont's high school graduates' course-taking patterns (e.g., total number of units, academic units, and non-academic units) had not changed during the period represented by the three cohort graduation classes; and, (b) for graduates in general, increased achievement had not occurred as measured by overall GPAs, grades in selected core courses, and ACT/SAT scores. Decoteau also points out that it was inappropriate to assume that improvement would be the result of increased requirements since the first cohort class affected by any increases would be the 1990 class.

Concerning the at-risk populations as represented by the Black and Special Education samples, Decoteau found a similar overall pattern of course-taking that was found for graduates in general. However, achievement levels differed in that the transcript data showed that Black achievement had improved across the three cohorts. For the Special Education graduates, their overall achievement actually declined. Decoteau's analysis of the transcript data showed that for the Black population their achievement more than likely was a result of a steady decrease in remedial course-taking and involvement in more higher level academic coursework. Decoteau viewed the decrease in special education achievement based upon a significant increase of mainstreamed course-taking where grading was more than likely compared to their non-handicapped peers, e.g. receiving more A's in self-contained courses versus C's in mainstreamed classes.

Longitudinal Shifts in the Percentages of Course-taking

Composites of the three populations sampled were compiled through Decoteau's transcript data. Figure 3 presents the composite course-taking for Fremont's graduates in general. Figures 4 and 5 presents the composites for the Black and special education graduates respectively.

According to theses figures, Decoteau identified several shifts occurring for each of the three representative samples. For each of the three samples, he found that when one area of study was increased, a responding discipline showed a decrease. This was shown in the sample representing students in general but a slight but steady decrease in vocational education enrollments at the expense of increased mathematics course-taking. This pattern also repeated itself for the Black and special education composites. Of particular note is that, vocational education is the curricular area from which all graduates earned the most units for graduation (21-42%). Table 4 presents a comparison between each of the 1987 sample composites and the ISBE 1990 mandates. The table's data demonstrate what little impact the revised state mandates will have on the overall course-taking patterns of Fremont secondary students.

Impact of the IBHE Eligibility Requirements

Similar to the data described in Table 4, the composites provide a means to determine the impact of the IBHE on those graduates from the Fremont School District. Table 5 presents the 1987 composite comparisons in relation to the IBHE Eligibility Guidelines. It is clear from the data presented that utilizing the IBHE criteria as a means to provide all graduates from a

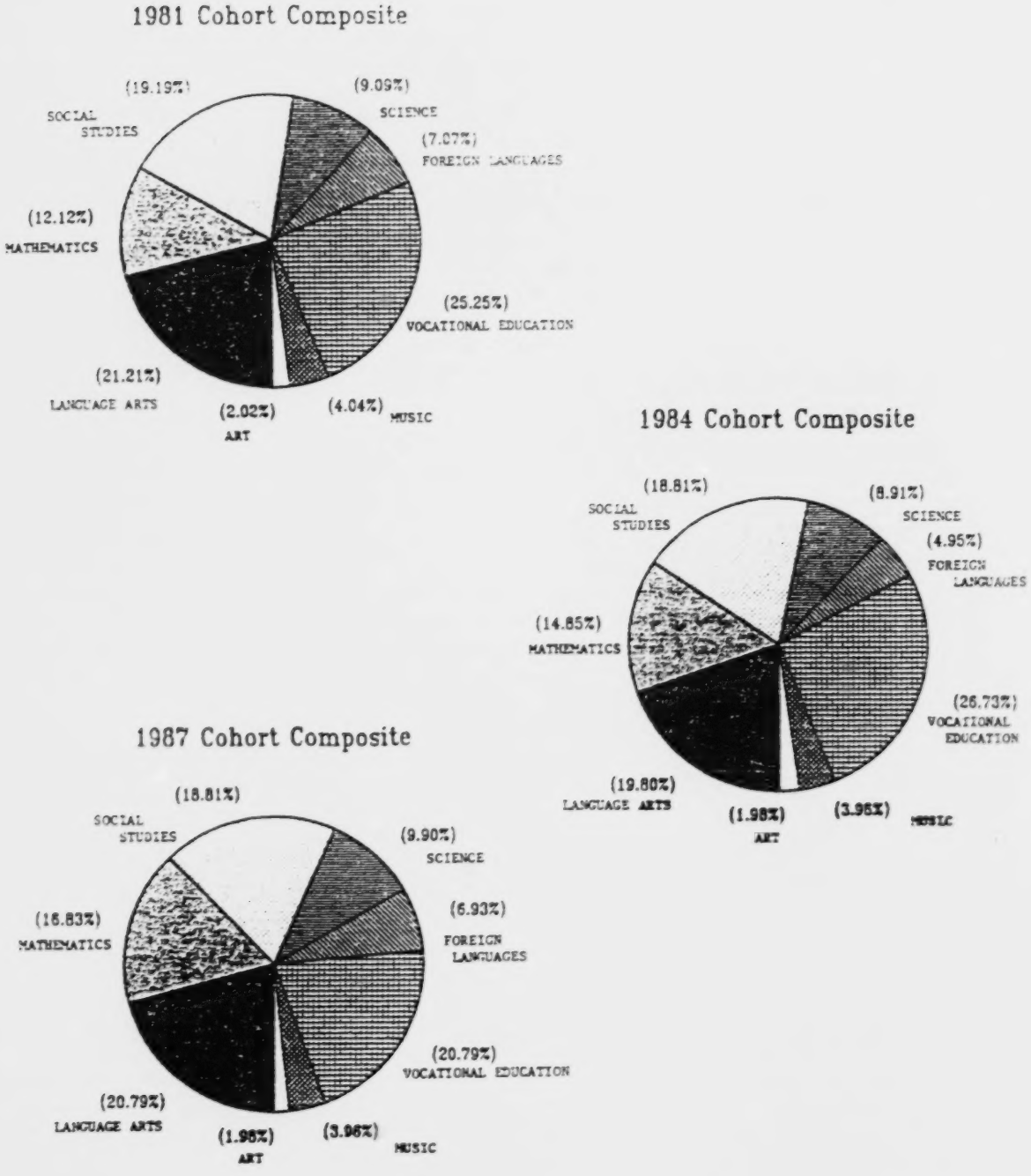


Figure 3. Pie charts depicting graduates in general course-taking across the three graduation cohorts.

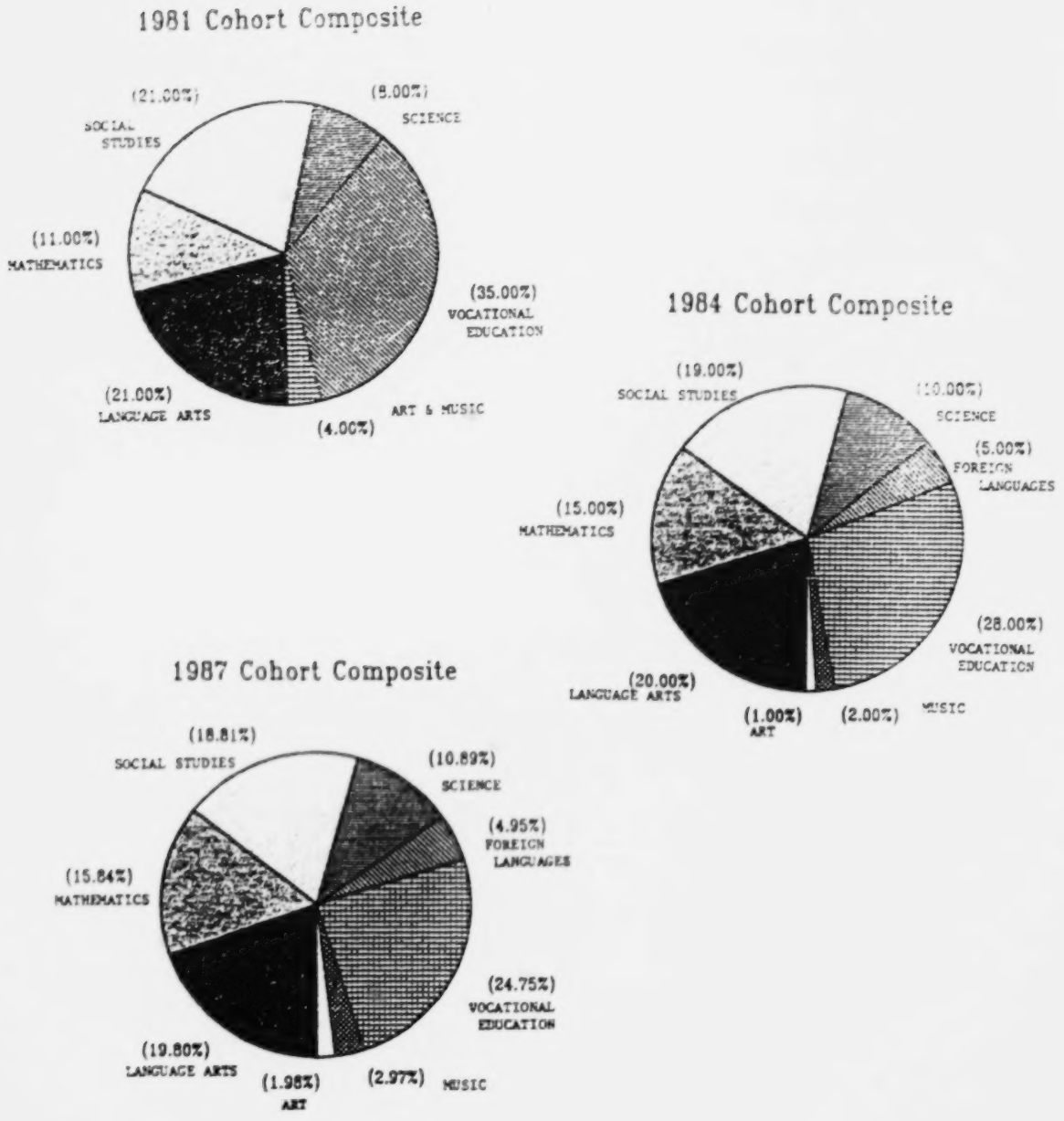
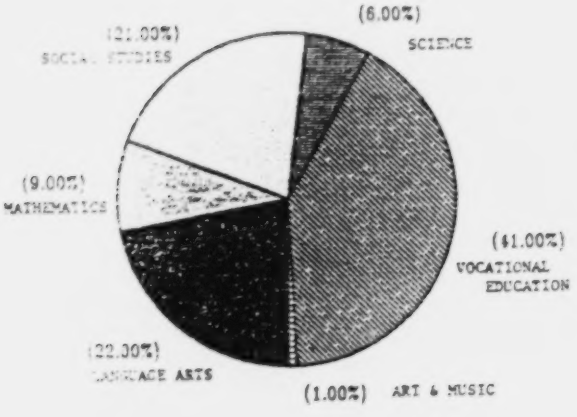
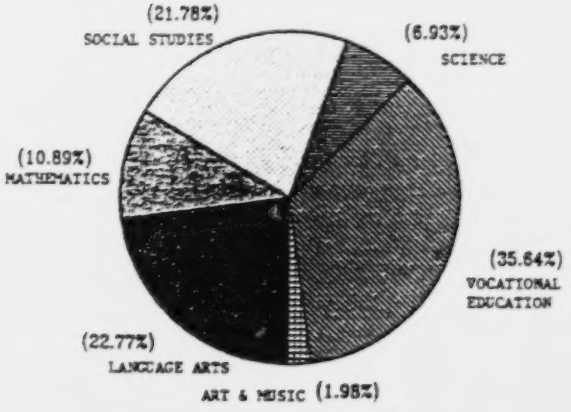


Figure 4. Pie charts depicting Black Graduates course-taking across the three graduation cohorts.

1981 Cohort Composite



1984 Cohort Composite



1987 Cohort Composite

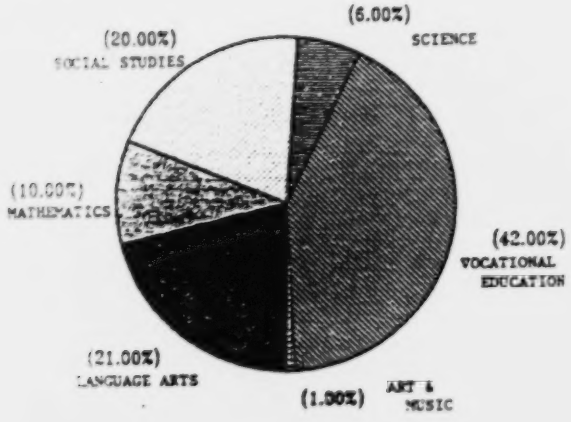


Figure 5. Pie charts depicting special education course-taking across the three graduation cohorts.

Table 4

Percentage Comparisons Between 1987 Cohorts and 1990 ISBE Graduation Mandates

Discipline	Graduates	Black	Special Ed	ISBE
Language Arts	21	20	21	21
Mathematics	17	16	10	12
Social Studies	19	19	20	12
Science	10	11	6	6
Foreign Language	7	5	0	6*
Vocational Education	21	25	42	-
Music/Art	6	5	1	-

* ISBE indicates 6% may be from Foreign Language/Art/Vocational Education

Table 5

Percentage Comparisons Between 1987 Cohorts and 1990 IBHE Eligibility Guidelines

Discipline	Graduates	Black	Special Ed	IBHE
Language Arts	21	20	21	27
Mathematics	17	16	10	20
Social Studies	19	19	20	20
Science	10	11	6	20
Foreign Language	7	5	0	13
Vocational Education	21	25	42	-
Music/Art	6	5	1	-

district the opportunity to go on to college, will eliminate the possibility of vocational education involvement let alone involvement in the fine arts. This, I believe, is the basic question to which Chicago first responded in its overt opposition to the IBHE Eligibility Guidelines and now districts throughout the state are beginning to recognize the implications for their own students.

Distortions Provided by the School Report Card

Perhaps one of Decoteau's most disturbing findings related to the school reform rhetoric was the discrepancy between information contained within the Illinois School Report Card and the actual curricular course-taking of high school graduates. As part of his study of the course-taking patterns of Fremont's graduates, Decoteau compared the differences between the report card classifications of students being in the academic, general, and vocational education tracks to similar classifications based upon student course-taking. Table 6 presents a comparison of the classification criteria used for the ISBE Report Card and those used by Decoteau. Of note is that the IBHE criteria was used by Decoteau to identify those students who took an academic preparation in high school. Also of note is that the ISBE Report Card criteria neglects to consider those who take a concentration of vocational course-taking within their high school, e.g., Business Education, Industrial/Technology Education, and Consumer and Home Economics. One way of differentiating between the two differing criteria for determining track is that the Report Card criteria categorizes students according to behaving like an academic student (sending a transcript to a postsecondary institution and/or taking the ACT exam), versus classifying students according to their actual course preparation.

Table 7 presents the significant differences between the school report card classifications and those based upon actual course-taking. Decoteau remarked in the summary of his study of the danger of reporting that the majority of the high school students are "now" taking an academic preparation when in reality, less than 20% of graduates and 7% of Black graduates are actually taking those courses which would make them eligible for postsecondary enrollment when the 1993 IBHE guidelines go into effect.

Transition, School Reform, and Re-Authorization

Much like the mental picture of one trying to go up the down staircase (or escalator) has been the sense given when comparing the evolving access to vocational education opportunities ... and the sometimes opposing state and local efforts being implemented in the name of school reform. Hopefully, if this analogy has been successful in pointing out how the Carl Perkins Transition initiative, especially in the state of Illinois, have been compromised by school reform efforts, implications for the re-authorization of the Perkins Act arise. Rather than making specific recommendations to those present, several questions seeking answers are presented here:

1. If the Fremont data generally reflects the impact of the ISBE increased graduation requirements across most districts in Illinois, has there been any real attempt to reform public education in Illinois vis-a-vis mandated graduation requirements?

Table 6

Comparison of ISBE and Course-taking Track Criteria

Track	Classification Criteria	
	School Report Card	Curricular Course-taking
Academic	Sent Transcript to a Postsecondary Institution	IBHE Criteria
Vocational	Attended the Area Vocational Center*	Completed a Minimum of Three Units in one Vocational Area
General	Everybody Else	Everybody Else

* Unless a transcript was sent, then the student was classified as an academic track student

Table 7

Percentage Comparisons of ISBE and Coure-taking Classifications

Track	1987 Graduates		1987 Black Grads		1987 Sped. Grads	
	Card	Curr	Card	Curr	Card	Curr
Academic	59	19	50	7	33	0
General	26	35	35	37	25	8
Vocational	15	46	15	57	42	92

2. If the Fremont data generally reflects the potential impact of the IBHE post-secondary eligibility requirements for Illinois school districts, what group of students will be most affected as they try to embrace a more academic curriculum?

3. By establishing these IBHE eligibility requirements, has the IBHE unwittingly legitimized the return of tracking to Illinois public schools?

4. Recognizing those aspects of vocational education participation that stimulate student interest in pursuing a post-secondary experience, is there a role for vocational education for those not planning a post-secondary experience?

5. In viewing the re-authorization of the Carl Perkins legislation, would special needs populations be better served by those legislators asking whether or not the proposed changes will contribute to the continuation of the intent behind the transition initiatives ... the access and equity to vocational education by special populations?

6. Will eliminating the Handicapped and Disadvantaged setasides, as proposed in HR 7 contribute to the continued increase or decrease in the accessing of vocational education by these populations?

7. Will monies contained within block grant awards to eligible recipients be diverted from those who need it the most?

For those presently involved in the reform of public education, the recent release of the Sixth Annual Education Performance Chart by the USDE must be sending shivers up your spine. Who would have guessed it? Despite the reform efforts being implemented in the 1980s, public education is still considered stagnant, SAT/ACT scores continue to decline, and states such as Florida are seeing a drop out rate of 40%. Who do you think will be blamed ... the reformers or the schools and its teachers?

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